

MACAULAY'S USE OF LITERATURE

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The government used the Gazette to publish what political news it thought desirable. But even under the reign of William the Gazette was not much to be relied upon. Describing at length the sufferings of Schomberg's army in Ireland during 1689 Macaulay says : ' The lying of the London Gazette is monstrous. Through the whole autumn the troops are constantly said to be in good condition/ ¹ Unofficial journals were prevented by therestrictions of the censorship from publishing news disagreeable to the government. After the expiration of the Licensing Act in 1695, the newspapers became gradually more independent, and in consequence contain at once more news and more truth, but it was a long time before they ventured to comment freely on public affairs and exerted much influence on the formation of public opinion.²

The deficiencies of the newspapers were supplied to some extent by the newsletters circulated in manuscript. Of them Macaulay gives the following account:

The newswriter rambled from coffee room to coffee room, collecting reports, squeezed himself into the Sessions House at the Old Bailey if there was an interesting trial, nay, perhaps obtained admission to the gallery of Whitehall, and noticed how the King and Duke looked. In this way he gathered materials for weekly epistles destined

to enlighten some country town or some
bench of rustic
magistrates. Such were the sources from
which the in-
habitants of the largest provincial cities,
and the great
body of the gentry and clergy, learned almost
all that they
knew of the history of their own time. ... At
the seat of a
man of fortune in the country the newsletter
was Im-
patiently expected. Within a week after it
had arrived it
had been thumbed by twenty families. It
furnished the
neighbouring squires with matter for talk
over their

¹ IV, 1694 (xiv).

² V, 2540-4 (xxi).